UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001188

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E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: KNNP PARM PTER SENV IZ JO
SUBJECT: JORDAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION SEEKS U.S. ASSISTANCE FOR RADIATION PORTALS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In a 20 February meeting, Jordan Atomic Energy Commission DG Kodah made a strong pitch for U.S. technical and financial assistance in the operation of Jordan's five radiation portals. In addition, Kodah is keen for his staff to participate in upcoming EXBS training on export controls and identification of possible dual-use items transiting Jordan. The DG bemoaned his agency's lack of funding and the insufficient staff to man the portals effectively. While he greatly appreciated IAEA support, including the recent furnishing of two additional portals and training, Kodah suggested that an annual $140,000 commitment is needed to get all Jordanian portals up and running in an efficient manner. That said, no official cooperative mechanism currently exists among the JAEC, customs, and intelligence services to ensure proper coordination at Jordan's borders. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a call by Econ Counselor and NEA Regional Environment Officer on the Director General of the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), Dr. Ziad Kodah, we heard a refrain of his September 2002 plea to visiting DOE, Customs, and State Department non-proliferation officials: His fledgling independent agency has insufficient resources--financial, technical, and human--to effectively monitor the transit of radioactive material through Jordan. Kodah explained that the JAEC was responsible for the five portals in the country; two had just been received from the IAEA and are scheduled to be "operational" sometime in March. The challenge, he explained, is the JAEC's manpower shortage, a function of its small size, relative youth, and inability to eke out a larger budget from an already strapped government.

¶3. (SBU) Kodah defined the JAEC portal mission as one originally keyed to identifying imported radioactive material; however, that is expected to evolve to also include exported and smuggled material. JAEC only received the mandate to operate these radiation detection units in August 2002. Despite the inability of the JAEC to adequately staff its current five portals, he lamented the fact that the number Jordan has is probably insufficient to do the job. With eight official ports of entry, the five clearly cannot cope with all of the traffic, Kodah added. To combat this shortfall, Jordan has chosen to deploy the portals in the following priority manner: of the three purchased by the JAEC (Canadian manufactured "Exploronium" gamma-only variety), one each is stationed at the Jaber border with Syria, the Iraqi border, and Sheikh Hussein Bridge border with Israel; the two recent IAEA machines (Yantar II variety) are deployed at Aqaba port and the Iraqi border.

¶4. (SBU) At the Iraqi border, the portal has only been operational for the past four months after the unit was redeployed from the Israel/Sheikh Hussein Bridge. General Intelligence Directorate (GID) officers, who, Kodah believed, are insufficiently trained in its operation, man it. Also, Kodah admitted that the unit is exclusively looking at material imported to Jordan. No checks of material departing the country are currently being conducted using the portals. As Kodah commented, "we've been working on the assumption that there is no unaccounted for radioactive material in Jordan, so we're only interested in that which is being smuggled into the country."

¶5. (SBU) When asked if there was close coordination among the JAEC, Jordanian intelligence services and customs authorities, Kodah regretted that there was "no official cooperation" and no committee to jointly discuss issues of cross-cutting concern. He explained that the current system allowed for customs officers to identify a suspect shipment, alert the GID, which in turn sends the material in question to JAEC labs. Kodah was confident of his staff's abilities to correctly identify the material. Although he had no idea of the percentage of traffic searched, he was able to share with us that about 300 "hits" had occurred that warranted further investigation and testing. Most, he confided, were of a "natural radioactivity," such as in sulfur or cuprite shipments, as well as individuals who were taking iodine for thyroid therapy. While the lab tests are ongoing, as a regulatory agency JAEC has the legal ability to detain questionable vehicles.

¶6. (SBU) During the course of our conversation, Kodah returned often to what was obviously troubling him about JAEC--its shortage of manpower and funding. Without these two critical elements sufficiently addressed, he argued, the JAEC didn't have the tools to implement its mission. Kodah estimates that about 35 new personnel, at an annual cost of about $140,000, would be needed to fully staff all of the portals. In addition, he added to his wish list mobile labs to test suspect material quickly on-site.

¶7. (SBU) Background on the JAEC: The JAEC, established in September 2001, is an outgrowth of the Ministry of Energy. It is an independent regulatory agency with a staff of about 50, five of whom have nuclear engineering degrees. The JAEC currently comprises five departments--licensing and inspection, calibration and radiation protection, nuclear applications and research, administration and finance, and international cooperation and public information. A sixth department will be formed once the calibration element is broken out of its current configuration.

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